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SUBJECT: US DELIVERS TEN UH-1H HELICOPTERS TO ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES

¶1. On June 9, the Philippine Government and the United States celebrated the official transfer of 10 U.S. newly refurbished UH-1H helicopters to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The helicopters fulfilled an earlier commitment made by President Bush to Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, and are part of the long term U.S. commitment to the AFP's modernization effort. The donation received funding under a \$22 million Foreign Military Financing program for the Philippines, aimed at assisting in its modernization goals while supporting the fight against terrorism. Ten additional helicopters are scheduled for delivery later in the year.

¶2. Notable dignitaries in the Philippine government and military attended the festive ceremony. In addition to President Arroyo, also in attendance were Philippine Secretary of National Defense Hermogenes Ebdane and Assistant Secretary Roberto Nuqui, AFP Chief of Staff General Hermogenes Esperon and Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Pedrito Cadungog, Chief of Naval Operations Vice Admiral Rogelio Calunsag, senior officers of the U.S. Joint Military Assistance Group, the U.S. Defense Attach, and a host of other U.S. and AFP officers and enlisted personnel in the AFP.

¶3. The Commanding General of the Philippine Air Force, Lt. Gen. Horacio Tolentino, gave brief remarks during the ceremony at the headquarters of the Philippine Air Force Headquarters in Manila. He expressed deep gratitude to President Bush and the U.S. government for the helicopters, and noted that they would assist the AFP in national security operations in southern Mindanao and throughout the country.

¶4. President Arroyo and Ambassador Kenney christened one of the helicopters with champagne and posed in front of the helicopters for numerous news photos. The event received extensive and positive media coverage.

¶5. Following the ceremony, the President and the Ambassador met privately (septel). President Arroyo expressed her deep appreciation to President Bush for the U.S. government's continuing support and assistance in the fight against terrorism. She told the Ambassador that the AFP wants to buy additional U.S. aircraft because "that's what our pilots like to fly."

KENNEY